

Poetic licence

IT'S TUESDAY night so this must be Poetry Live. Up at Ponsonby's Grand Central, wordsmiths gather each week to read their latest masterpieces. This evening, Murray Haddow is guest poet along with his guitar-hero mate, Mike Scorey. Haddow, described by his contemporaries as a "punk rock poet genius", in turn describes himself as a "late-developing regressive adolescent", and late-developing regressive adolescents are capable of almost anything. Like the time, and it's still talked about with awe, he took off his clothes on stage at The King's Arms, donned his gardening gear (he had his own gardening business, but sacked himself) and started up an industrial lawnmower which he proceeded, with motor running, to swing around above his head. Haddow laughs when I mention it. "That was the most bizarre show of the lot that night," he recalls, "and I don't know if it will be repeated again for some time." And he adds: "I don't think I could even lift a lawnmower these days." More's the pity but never mind, we've got Mike Scorey to take our breath away. Reed thin and cheek bones you'd sell your grandmother for, this is the first time he's played during a poetry get-together and I sincerely hope it's not the



last. He's stunning. Our very own answer to Bob Dylan some say. The room of poets waiting their turn to read falls silent. Beat poet and ex-Beautiful Loser Shane Hollands chugs from a hip flask, Miriam Barr and Andra Jenkin check over their notes. One opens with the line: "I don't come here to listen to you. I come here to listen to the sound of my own voice." And so it goes. Words spat and kicked and thrown against the wall. This is angst central. None of your wishy-washy "host of golden daffodils" palaver.

Think rain-swapt nights, love lost, madness and despair with droll wit tossed in to lift life's bleak

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creeping docks and bloody bougainvillea which ripped my eyelids and locks". Nice one. For a man who says he's struggled with words all his life he's doing just fine.

A READER writes: "Your comments (June 4) about the BNZ and the Jean Batten building particularly interested me. This is actually the third iconic building that the BNZ has demolished. The first was Victoria Arcade, then the elegant Edwardian building that is now just a facade. Thirdly, the Jean Batten building. All in the name of progress, you understand. I haven't yet read Alain de Botton's interestingly-titled book *The Architecture of Happiness*, but it apparently addresses the notion that we feel better when we live in well-designed spaces. Sounds reasonable. It wouldn't take a huge leap of the imagination to apply that to the town planning, now would it? If surrounding ourselves with beauty makes us feel better, the nonsense that is called development in the city is destined to make us feel very sick. As my guests

say to me when they look around town, "but isn't Christchurch a beautiful city". Sigh. The letter writer is Susan Sweetman, who with her husband, owns and operates Braemar, a 103-year-old faithfully restored bed and breakfast in the heart of the city. Braemar even has a Batten Suite named after Jean Batten's father, who lodged there long before his daughter was even a twinkle in his eye. A little bit of our history lives on.

AFTER all the bad publicity about the tardiness of the buses, a reasonable person might think Stagecoach would be in severe damage control and getting things right. They're not. Why do commuters even bother? One I spoke to was waiting, incandescent with rage, at a Britomart bus stop. His bus to Remuera, according to the electronic timetable, was "due" in three minutes. Then it was "delayed". Then it was "due" in 56 minutes. Then 25 minutes. He was last seen striking out on foot with steam pouring out his ears. And we still have the ongoing saga of the missing Link. At 5pm on a Thursday I noted that these silver slugs, which we are advised run every 10 minutes, were all delayed for at least three-quarters of an hour. This \$7 million system is a scandal. Heads should roll.



Judith Baragwanath has been writing about Auckland for more years than she cares to remember.